

NAPHIS: A Vision for Global Leadership

*Remarks by Bruce I. Knight, Under Secretary for
Marketing and Regulatory Programs
APHIS Senior Leaders Conference
Washington, DC
November 1, 2006*

Thank you, Ron (DeHaven). I'm sorry I wasn't able to join you yesterday at the beginning of your conference—but there was a competing animal ID event in Kansas City.

I'm glad I could be here this morning to share a bit of my perspective after almost three months as your Under Secretary. I know we have many important issues and challenges facing us in the days ahead, and I welcome this time to meet with you as you're working on your operational plan for 2007.

Globalization

Over the past several years, we've seen a tremendous amount of change—and the pace of change has speeded up as well. Our world has become smaller and our responsibilities larger.

We can certainly empathize with Dorothy when she landed in Oz and told her dog, "Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." The fact is, we're still in Kansas, but we may also be in Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Kampala.

Globalization has changed the landscape of our world significantly—and forever. Everyone in USDA has experienced this to some extent. Our planet and our lives are more interconnected and interdependent than ever before.

French President Jacques Chirac has referred to this phenomenon as a "tidal wave that is mingling the irreversible globalization of human activity with ever-faster scientific and technical progress." American economic writer Thomas L. Friedman says simply that "The world is flat."

Whatever language you use, we have a new landscape before us, and it stretches not from sea to shining sea but from continent to continent all around the globe. The exciting part is that international opportunities come right to our doorstep.

But the shrinking planet also brings the world's problems directly to our fields, flocks and farms. And no one knows that better than the people who deal with invasive pests and plants and world-ranging diseases such as Avian Influenza and BSE.

Sick chickens in Bangkok could lead to dead ducks in New Jersey or to infected turkeys in the Shenandoah Valley. And one case of BSE in the U.S. could shut down valuable markets on the other side of the world.

In fact, we're still working to recover markets lost in 2003—markets that for the first three quarters of 2005 more than \$1.2 billion BELOW the same period in 2003. We'll probably increase our sales of beef abroad this year by 50 percent from what we sold in 2005, but the total value of exported beef and variety meats will still be only half the value of our sales in 2003.

Globalization is a direct outgrowth of the information revolution spawned, spurred and spread by the Internet. The Internet links disparate parts of the globe and flattens the planet by making the same information available to anyone with a computer and a connection. The more information available to the world's citizens, the more they expect and demand, and the faster they want it.

APHIS Opportunities

So what does globalization have to do with APHIS' planning for the upcoming year? Well, globalization describes the environment in which we work and why the expectations for us and our work have changed.

The diminishing size of our world also gives APHIS an unprecedented opportunity to play a leadership role on the global stage—a role that will benefit not only American agriculture but people across the earth.

Here's what I mean. In recent years, your agency has also gone through a period of rapid change—largely because of major disease events, specifically Avian Influenza and BSE. Your visibility has increased. At times your work makes national and international headlines. You have a much broader audience—a multi-national, multi-cultural audience that reaches beyond scientists and producers to policymakers—here and abroad.

Further, instead of throwing up barriers at the border against disease, you're now working to contain problems at the source, whether that's in Indonesia or Nigeria

or China. APHIS' work has moved increasingly beyond the confines of laboratories in Ames or offices in Riverdale to the world at large.

Problems, funds and scrutiny have all increased exponentially. Ten years ago, in 1996, APHIS drew the equivalent in 2004 dollars of \$56.7 million in emergency transfers from the CCC—for two concerns—the karnal bunt and fruit flies. Five years later, in 2001, the agency drew nearly \$361 million (in 2004 dollars) to address nine pests or diseases.

This past fiscal year, you've drawn \$60 million from CCC for six concerns, but received an additional \$480 million from other sources to address Avian Influenza and citrus canker for a total of more than \$540 million.

More pests and diseases mean more headlines and a higher level of oversight. In 1996, there were two OIG audits and one GAO audit. In 2001, OIG conducted eight investigations, and GAO looked at two issues. This year OIG has investigated seven issues, while GAO has conducted four audits.

Furthermore, issues that in the past may have appeared separate are now more clearly and visibly linked. That means decisions made in APHIS affect the work that FAS does or NRCS or FSA or FS—and vice versa. More variables need to be considered, more partners consulted and more stakeholders involved. No decision occurs in a vacuum. Every decision must be based on sound science but arrived at in conjunction with other players and bearing in mind geopolitical realities.

As an increasingly visible scientific leader, APHIS is poised to advance the value of science-based decisions and help remove phony trade barriers while keeping in place reasonable protections based on real concerns about plant and animal health.

Decisionmaking

I spoke about my philosophy on decisionmaking during the town hall sessions both in Jefferson Auditorium and at the Riverdale office. I want to just reiterate one phrase—"knowing the value of gathering enough information to make a good decision quickly enough to make a difference." That's a philosophy I hope you will follow as well.

Even as we need to consult more people, we need to make decisions more quickly. Many of you are scientists. I know scientists would prefer to wait to make a decision until all the evidence is in or until we reach the 95 percent confidence

level. I would, too. Unfortunately, in the real world of competing priorities and demand for instant solutions, that isn't always possible.

That doesn't mean we shoot first and ask questions later. But it does mean that we may not have all the answers at the point at which we need to make a decision. So we need to take the best information we have and make the best decision we can.

I strongly support using sound science as the basis for our decisions. I know that is critical to you as well. In that vein, we need to think and act strategically and proactively to anticipate needs and have the sound science ready to respond when there are questions.

What are the scientific needs for policy decisions in 2007, 2010 or 2017? At the same time, we all understand that policies must also take into account political realities, time pressures and cost-effectiveness.

Key Principles

As you do your planning and as we move forward, we're going to be emphasizing four things:

1. More transparency
2. Better communication
3. Increased accountability
4. Greater flexibility

More Transparency

Transparency is critical to our work. It is also a philosophical touchstone for Secretary Johanns. We need to share the information we develop with all our stakeholders so that everyone will understand the scientific basis for the decisions we make.

We need to maintain a fair and level playing ground. To be transparent, we must maintain a website that's chock full of information and is easy to navigate. For our customers in the U.S.—and those we want to inform and influence abroad—the APHIS website is a primary source of information.

Better communication

Secondly, we need to be clear, concise and persuasive when we communicate with our partners and producers. We can't just say "We're the good guys, and we're here to help you."

We need to be able to demonstrate our value and the value of the programs we offer—like animal ID. We must be prepared to address challenges, myths and half-truths with solid facts and support from those who partner with us. We must also listen to understand our critics and address their concerns with care and respect.

Increased accountability

APHIS is also going to face increased accountability. The bottom line is results—and we need to hold ourselves accountable to our clients and the taxpayers. We need to be efficient, effective and frugal—to get the most bang for the taxpayer's buck. And we're competing with every other federal agency for our share of the budget.

I expect that we will very likely face an even greater demand for oversight and for showing exactly what we've done with the taxpayers' money in the days ahead. We will want to identify ways to work smarter, to streamline processes, eliminate unnecessary tasks and increase efficiency. We should also be building performance incentives into our cooperative agreements and anywhere else that it would make sense—again to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Greater flexibility

As you plan, I hope you will also take into account the need for greater flexibility. Natural disasters, potential terrorism, emergence of new pests and diseases may demand our attention in the midst of all the routine concerns that we must address day in and day out.

We need to be nimble and creative, ready to move in whatever direction circumstances require.

Anticipating Needs

Toward that end, we need to anticipate possible issues and concerns to the extent we can. We need to take a hard look at our programs and policies.

Where are we vulnerable and how can we reduce our vulnerability? What checks and balances are in place internally? Where do we need to take corrective action? What information do we need to assemble today because we know we'll be asked tomorrow?

As you plan, I encourage you to take advantage of your work to fulfill the requirements of the President's Management Agenda. Don't look at this as a check-the-box exercise that you keep doing until you get to green. The real objective of PMA is to be a tool for managers. I challenge you to take PMA and make it come alive and work for you as managers and leaders.

Also, I would urge you to keep me informed. As I said at the town hall meetings, I don't want to read APHIS news for the first time on the pages of *The Washington Post*. Keep me in the loop. Then we'll celebrate good news or if there's trouble ahead, we'll work together to head it off.

Conclusion

As managers, it's critical that we maintain a broad focus—not zeroing in solely on problems, but on an integrated vision for strengthening animal and plant health in this country—and around the world.

It's been said we shouldn't be pushed by our problems. Instead we should be led by our dreams. To me, that means keeping our vision first and foremost so we make progress toward our overarching goals even as we respond to pressing problems.

For APHIS, I see a window of opportunity to take a world leadership role in plant and animal health. A world shrunk by globalization and sped up by rapid communications and the increasing pace of innovation needs a leader with a vision and a strategy for safeguarding the plants and animals we all rely on.

APHIS excels in responding to disasters and managing crises. With globalization, we're faced with an exponential increase in fires, and it's easy to expend everything we have fighting those fires.

But if we only wait for disaster to strike, it's easy to lose sight of our underlying mission: helping farmers and ranchers—here and abroad—develop and maintain healthy plant and animal communities.

APHIS has incredible scientific expertise and capability. Recovery from diseases and pests is critical. But prevention and protection is even more important. We must ensure that we have enough energy, time and resources to look beyond today's problems to tomorrow's possibilities.

I look forward to working with you to do that.